

WOMEN'S MEDIAN WAGES IN IDAHO MAKE GAINS, STILL LAG MEN'S WAGES

The 2001 recession took its toll on Idaho and the nation. But while stifling most economic activity, it was another period of gains for Idaho's working women.

While still a far cry from the wages paid men, women made considerable progress during the downturn in closing the wage gap. Their pay jumped while compensation for men was stagnating.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that from 2001 to 2003 the median weekly earnings for women in Idaho rose from \$436 to \$476, a 9.2 percent gain, while men posted only a \$3 increase to \$602, a 0.5 percent gain. That means half those in the work force made more than the median amount and half made less.

Idaho women, whose comparative wages have ranked near the bottom of all the states in the past, made 79.2 percent of what men made in 2003. That lifted the state's ranking to 18th nationally. (See FYI Table 1 on page 37 for state comparisons of female wages as a percentage of male wages.)

In 2001, the median weekly earnings for Idaho women were under 73 percent of those for men, ranking the state 40th.

Nationally, women's median weekly earnings rose 8.0 percent from 2001 to 2003 to \$552 while median earnings for men were up only 3.4 percent to \$672. That left the ratio at 79.5 percent, nearly identical to Idaho's for the first time in years.

The improvement during a rough economic time reflected the vulnerability of men to layoffs in the industries they tend to dominate, like manufacturing, which are hit hardest by recessions. But it also reflected the likelihood that an increasing number of women were cracking the top-level, high-paying jobs that had eluded them in the past.

A comparison of median and average wages from 2001 to 2003 indicates real gains for women in jobs paying in the top half of the wage scale.

Pay for women in Idaho rose faster than for men across the economic spectrum except for jobs in

mining, utilities, construction and contract business support services.

Still, the comparative earnings of working women remain subject to cultural and social factors. Traditional family management limits many women to only part-time employment, which curtails earning power, and requires others to drop out of the labor force for extended periods to raise children or care for ailing parents.

The state's relatively high divorce rate also leaves women who have committed to the traditional path of marriage and children ill-equipped to compete for comparatively higher-paying jobs once they are back on their own.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, Idaho's divorce rate in 2002 was 5.3 for every 1,000 residents, fifth highest behind Nevada, Arkansas, Alabama and Wyoming. The 2000 census also found Idaho had three times as many single mothers as single fathers, and those women were three times as likely to have incomes below the poverty line.

The upward movement made on the wage front in the most recent recession capitalized on the momentum women established following the recession of the early 1980s. That economic setback put the inflation-adjusted median weekly wage for men into a tailspin that did not stop until the mid-1990s. It was not until 2001 that men regained the earnings level they had in 1979.

There was also a dip in inflation-adjusted median weekly earnings for women. But it lasted only through 1981, and then steady annual increases became the norm. That trend was interrupted, and then only in a limited way, in the mid-1990s as welfare reform and its lifetime limits on public assistance sent a stream of previously non-working women into low-paying jobs that dragged the median down slightly during a four-year period.

"The rate of progress in closing Idaho's hourly wage gap was better than average in the 1990s," the AFL-CIO said in an analysis following the 2000

census. “Idaho ranked seventh among all the states in progress in closing the hourly wage gap.”

But the labor organization concluded that even if the pace set in the last decade was maintained, Idaho’s working women would not achieve pay equity until 2027.

From 1979 through 2003, women’s median weekly earnings nationally jumped from just 62.5 percent of men’s earnings to 79.5 percent.

The level of education also is tied closely to earning power for women. That was a factor as well in allowing a wage gap to remain since only 19.4 percent of Idaho women over 25 hold college degrees, ranking the state 39th nationally.

The median wage for women with bachelor’s degrees or better was 98.5 percent of the median wage for men across the country in 2003.

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research, however, suggests the direct comparison of weekly wages between men and women understates the disparity. Its analysis of women’s and men’s earnings during their prime working years between the ages of 26 through 59 found that women made only 38 percent of what men earned. The research spanned 1983 to 1998 and reflects the social and cultural factors that affect women.

Researchers confirmed that women are more likely to work part-time and less likely to work year-round. They also found that more than half the women tracked over the 15-year period did not work for at least one full calendar year while only 16 percent of the men went an entire year without working.

“A career interruption like this has a large effect on the earnings of both men and women independent of their education and previous experience, and such interruptions partially account for women’s lower lifetime earnings,” wrote Heidi Hartmann, a co-author of the research report.

See FYI Table 2 on page 37 for Idaho industry-specific data on average wages and female-male worker comparisons, from 2001 to 2003.

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FYI Table 1: Female Earnings as % of Males by State, 2003

States	Percentage
Alabama	72.7
Alaska	78.4
Arizona	81.9
Arkansas	75.8
California	87.1
Colorado	84.2
Connecticut	74.1
Delaware	81.8
District of Columbia	95.1
Florida	80.7
Georgia	87.7
Hawaii	79.6
Idaho	79.2
Illinois	78.7
Indiana	74.7
Iowa	77.9
Kansas	78.4
Kentucky	78.7
Louisiana	71.4
Maine	76.9
Maryland	84.3
Massachusetts	78
Michigan	74.3
Minnesota	73.8
Mississippi	78.3
Missouri	76.7
Montana	74.5
Nebraska	74.3
Nevada	83.3
New Hampshire	72.1
New Jersey	79.8
New Mexico	79.7
New York	81.7
North Carolina	80.3
North Dakota	74.2
Ohio	75.2
Oklahoma	78.2
Oregon	74.9
Pennsylvania	75.3
Rhode Island	80
South Carolina	77.5
South Dakota	80.3
Tennessee	77.7
Texas	83.5
Utah	75.4
Vermont	82.4
Virginia	76.4
Washington	72.6
West Virginia	73.6
Wisconsin	76.8
Wyoming	65.3
United States	79.5

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

FYI Table 2: Male-Female Wage Data by Industry in Idaho, 4th Quarter 2003; Wage Comparisons 2001 to 2003

Industry	Total Labor Force	Female Labor Force	Average Weekly Wage	Average Male Wage	Average Female Wage	Female % of Male Average	% Female Increase from '01	% Male Increase from '01
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	22,733	6,154	\$521.54	\$575.08	\$365.31	63.52	10.62	7.04
Mining	1,935	253	\$957.46	\$995.08	\$730.38	73.40	26.90	12.70
Utilities	2,530	575	\$1,006.15	\$1,088.31	\$742.15	68.19	18.45	11.04
Construction	37,403	5,225	\$687.92	\$723.69	\$477.92	66.04	-0.05	-0.51
Manufacturing	64,286	18,236	\$873.00	\$963.69	\$644.54	66.88	11.01	8.38
Wholesale Trade	24,684	7,342	\$759.46	\$881.31	\$464.77	52.74	7.53	7.55
Retail Trade	76,265	38,273	\$484.15	\$616.15	\$351.23	57.00	9.10	5.08
Transportation, Warehousing	16,896	4,312	\$626.08	\$686.08	\$458.54	66.83	6.43	2.48
Information	9,965	4,775	\$699.69	\$822.92	\$564.69	68.62	5.52	4.64
Finance, Insurance	18,569	13,210	\$799.85	\$1,281.69	\$605.08	47.21	8.08	3.81
Real Estate, Rental, Leasing	7,395	3,756	\$470.54	\$556.62	\$389.31	69.94	4.39	3.25
Professional, Scientific, Tech Services	29,070	12,924	\$941.54	\$1,204.15	\$592.15	49.18	4.39	2.41
Management	7,913	3,625	\$915.69	\$1,171.38	\$619.85	52.92	12.81	11.34
Administration, Waste Management	35,535	16,201	\$457.85	\$517.85	\$390.00	75.31	7.78	8.09
Educational Services	52,464	35,692	\$550.38	\$699.00	\$483.00	69.10	0.58	0.00
Health Care and Social Assistance	64,995	52,025	\$624.23	\$1,201.15	\$479.31	39.90	7.62	0.21
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	8,117	4,214	\$346.62	\$417.23	\$287.54	68.92	10.76	7.36
Accommodation, Food Services	47,720	27,825	\$236.08	\$276.46	\$207.46	75.04	7.54	7.25
Other Services not Public Admin)	15,501	7,680	\$439.38	\$541.38	\$336.92	62.23	3.84	2.27
Public Administration	32,543	14,044	\$407.77	\$661.62	\$507.23	76.67	5.32	4.18

Source: Idaho Department of Commerce & Labor, Local Employment Dynamics Program.